



Massachusetts
Department
of
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION

fact sheet

Fluorescent Lamp Management for Consumers

The phosphor powder found inside fluorescent lamps - not only the familiar tubes, but the new "energy saver" lamps designed to replace conventional incandescent light bulbs - contains mercury. For that reason, used fluorescent lamps need to be handled and disposed of carefully. When one breaks or implodes, it releases mercury into the air and anyone nearby may be exposed to the vapors.

Why should I be concerned about mercury?

Mercury is toxic to the human nervous system. Chronic breathing of mercury vapors can cause a range of physical symptoms, including inability to coordinate body movement and impairment of hearing, speech and vision. Exposure to mercury in other forms can lead to skin rashes and kidney damage.

Under certain conditions, fluorescent lamps burned in waste-to-energy plants can release mercury to the air and water. Not even the best pollution control devices can capture all of the mercury all of the time.

Mercury in the water bioaccumulates - that is, it builds up in concentration over time in the tissue of fish, making them less healthful to eat frequently. Pregnant women who eat contaminated fish can pass mercury to their unborn children.

What should I do with my fluorescent lamps after they burn out?

Try not to throw them away. Some communities accept used fluorescent lamps for recycling either at permanent collection sites or during specially scheduled household hazardous waste collection days. Your local health board or public works department should have details. Although they are not required by law to do so, some retailers may also take used lamps back for recycling. If there are no recycling opportunities now, try to save your fluorescent lamps until you can dispose of them safely.

What about commercial recycling services?

There are a number of companies both in New England and across the country that dismantle used fluorescent lamps, remove the mercury-containing phosphor powder for later reuse and recycle the remaining aluminum and glass components.

How can I find fluorescent fixture recyclers in Massachusetts?

Consult the on-line Recycling Services Directory and Markets Guide for Massachusetts for a list of companies that recycle fluorescent fixtures. Look for the directory on the DEP's Recycling Home Page (www.state.ma.us/dep/recycle) under "Business & Industry." Fluorescent handlers are listed in the "Fluorescent Fixtures" section of the directory.

DEP does not guarantee that the recyclers listed in the directory are in full compliance with hazardous waste regulations. For out-of-state companies, contact the state environmental agency for information about the compliance status of a company.

For more information, contact:

DEP's Bureau of Waste Prevention at (617) 556-1096.

Office of Technical Assistance for Toxics Use Reduction at (617) 727-3260.

Massachusetts Department of
Environmental Protection
One Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108-4746

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
Jane Swift, Governor

Executive Office of
Environmental Affairs
Bob Durand, Secretary

Department of
Environmental Protection
Lauren A. Liss, Commissioner

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